

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED:

1. A system for monitoring the use of return-shipping labels comprising:

5 a merchant computer having a label generation application that creates a return-shipping label having a unique return-shipping label identifier and associates the unique return-shipping label identifier with an authorization identifier that has been provided to a customer desiring to return an item; and

10 a service provider computer having a label access application that allows the customer desiring to return an item having the authorization identifier to access and obtain the return-shipping label, the label access application monitors and records information about the return-shipping label including at least the date and time that the customer desiring to return an item accessed the return-shipping label.

2. The system of Claim 1, further comprising:

15 a commercial carrier computer having a commercial carrier package tracking application that is capable of providing tracking information about a package bearing the return-shipping label having a unique return-shipping label identifier that has been received by a commercial carrier to the label access application.

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3. The system of Claim 2, wherein the label access application that receives information provided by the commercial carrier package tracking application monitors and records at least the date and time that the package bearing the return-shipping label identifier was received by the commercial carrier.

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4. The system of Claim 3, wherein the service provider computer further has:  
a label reporting application that provides information recorded about a return-shipping label to a merchant.

5. The system of Claim 4, wherein the label reporting application that provides information recorded about a return-shipping label to a merchant provides information including at least the date and time that the customer desiring to return an item accessed the return-shipping label and at least the date and time that the package bearing the return-shipping label identifier was received by the commercial carrier.

6. The system of Claim 1, wherein the service provider computer further has:  
a label reporting application that provides information recorded about a return-shipping label to a merchant.

7. The system of Claim 6, wherein the label reporting application that provides information recorded about a return-shipping label to a merchant provides information including at least the date and time that the customer desiring to return an item accessed the return-shipping label.

8. A system for providing information about an item being returned to a merchant from a customer, comprising:

a communications device for receiving a return request from a customer;

5 a merchant returns application for determining whether the return request meets the merchant's business rules;

a merchant computer having a label generation application for creating an electronic pre-paid return-shipping label if the return request meets the merchant's business rules;

10 a notification device for notifying the customer that the electronic pre-paid return-shipping label is available for the customer's access and use;

a customer computer having a printing device that can be used by the customer to access and print the electronic pre-paid return-shipping label;

15 a commercial carrier computer having a package tracking application capable of tracking a package bearing the electronic pre-paid return-shipping label once the package has been received by a commercial carrier and recording such tracking information; and

20 a service provider computer having a label access application that monitors and records the customer's access to the electronic pre-paid return-shipping label and receives and records the tracking information from the commercial carrier package tracking application; and

a label reporting application that provides information recorded about the customer's access to the electronic pre-paid return-shipping label and the tracking information from the commercial carrier package tracking application a to a merchant.

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9. A method for monitoring the use of a return-shipping label, comprising:  
receiving notification that a customer desires to return an item;  
creating a return-shipping label for the customer's use;  
making the return-shipping label available for the customer's use;  
5 recording at least a time and date the return-shipping label was made  
available for the customer's use;  
notifying the customer of the return-shipping label's availability;  
receiving a network request to access the return-shipping label, wherein  
such network request originates with the customer; and  
10 recording at least a date and time of the customer's access to the return  
shipping label, if accessed by the customer.
10. The method of Claim 9, further comprising:  
providing the return-shipping label to the customer;  
15 recording at least a time and date the customer was provided the return-  
shipping label;  
receiving at least a time and date that a package bearing the return-  
shipping label is received by a commercial carrier; and  
recording at least the time and date that the package bearing the return-  
20 shipping label is received by the commercial carrier.
11. The method of Claim 10, further comprising:  
making the recorded information about at least the date and time the  
return-shipping label was made available to the customer, the date and time of the  
25 customer's access to the return-shipping label, at least the date and time the  
customer obtained the return-shipping label, and at least the time and date the  
package bearing the return-shipping label is received by the commercial carrier  
available to the merchant.
- 30 12. The method of Claim 11, wherein the method is used for monitoring the  
use of a return-shipping label in the shipment of an electronic device.

13. The method of Claim 12, wherein the electronic device is one or more  
chosen from the group consisting of a computer, video projector, television, video  
recorder, stereo device, audio recorder, video display device, radio receiver, radio  
5 transmitter, two-way communication device, cellular telephone, digital telephone,  
analog telephone, personal digital assistant, printer, facsimile device, copier,  
paging device, camera, and combinations thereof.

14. The method of Claim 11, wherein the recorded information at least the  
10 date and time the return-shipping label was made available to the customer, the  
date and time of the customer's access to the return-shipping label, at least the  
date and time the customer obtained the return-shipping label, and at least the  
time and date the package bearing the return-shipping label is received by the  
commercial carrier available to the merchant so that the merchant can develop a  
15 reasonable estimate of the date the return item will arrive at a location designated  
by the merchant.

15. The method of Claim 11, further comprising:  
receiving at least a time and date the package bearing the return-shipping  
20 label is delivered by the commercial carrier;  
recording at least the time and date the package bearing the return-  
shipping label is delivered by the commercial carrier; and  
making the recorded information about at least the time and date the  
package bearing the return-shipping label is delivered by the commercial carrier  
25 available to the merchant.

16. The method of Claim 15, wherein the recorded information of  
at least the date and time the return-shipping label was made available to  
the customer,

the date and time of the customer's access to the return-shipping label,

5 at least the date and time the customer obtained the return-shipping label,

at least the time and date the package bearing the return-shipping label is  
received by the commercial carrier, and

at least the time and date the package bearing the return-shipping label is  
delivered by the commercial carrier is made available to the merchant so that the  
10 merchant can develop a reasonable estimate of the date the return item arrives at a  
location designated by the merchant.

17. A method of providing information about the use of a return-shipping label to a merchant, comprising:

receiving a return request from a customer to return an item;

providing a return material authorization to the customer if the request  
5 meets a merchant's business rules for a valid return, otherwise refusing the return request;

creating a prepaid return-shipping label for the item;

controlling access to the prepaid return-shipping label;

notifying the customer that the prepaid return-shipping label has been  
10 created and is available for the customer's access and electronically transmitting a uniform resource locator hyper-link to the customer, the hyper-link can be used by the customer to access the prepaid return-shipping label upon the entry of the proper return material authorization;

receiving a network request to access to the prepaid return-shipping label;

15 receiving information from one or more package tracking applications of one or more commercial carriers to about a return item having the return-shipping label, wherein such information includes at least the date and time that the return item having the return-shipping label was received by the commercial carrier;  
and

20 providing information to the merchant about the customer's access to the return-shipping label and shipment of the return item.

18. A method comprising:

providing a merchant computer with an application for generating a return-shipping label for use by a customer to return an item purchased from the vendor;

5 receiving a communication from a customer desiring to return an item purchased from the merchant;

in response to the customer's communication, executing the application with the merchant computer to generate an electronic return-shipping label for transmission to the customer via a network;

10 executing the application to transmit data necessary for shipping the item to a designated return location from the merchant computer to a service provider computer via a network;

generating a return-shipping label for returning an item at the service provider computer;

15 transmitting a notification of availability of the return-shipping label for download to a customer via a network, the notification having a network resource identifier to identify a network location for downloading the electronic return-shipping label;

20 recording at least a date and time that the notification was made to the customer in a database associated with the service provider computer; and

making at least a date and time that the notification was made to the customer available to the merchant computer over the network.

19. A method as claimed in claim 18, wherein the notification is an email  
25 notification provided to an email address of the customer, which e-mail address has been provided from the merchant computer to the service provider computer in the data necessary for shipping the item.

20. A method as claimed in claim 18 wherein the data necessary for shipping  
30 the item includes a return location address.



21. A method, comprising:

providing a service provider computer capable of receiving a request to access a return-shipping label having a unique package tracking identifier that is linked with a return material authorization issued by a merchant;

5 receiving the request to access the return shipping label, wherein such request comes from a customer and includes at least the return material authorization;

making at least the date and time the request is received available to the merchant that issued the return material authorization.

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22. A method, comprising:

receiving of a communication from a customer to return an item purchased by the customer;

providing a return material authorization to the customer;

15 creating a return-shipping label that has a unique package tracking identifier that is associated with the return material authorization;

making access to the return-shipping label available to the customer having the return material authorization; and

20 receiving information about the customer's access to the return-shipping label, wherein such information includes whether the customer has or has not accessed the return shipping label and if the customer has accessed the return shipping label, at least the date and time that such access occurred.